



**Chicora Foundation, Inc.**  
PO Box 8664, Columbia, SC 29202

March 2010



# Monumental Issues

## Work at Violet Bank Cemetery, Colonial Heights, Virginia

### Inside this issue:

- Violet Bank Cemetery, Colonial Heights, VA **1**
- Columbia's Lower Cemetery Cleaned **2**

### Upcoming Talks & Workshops

- November 6, 2010—9th Annual Cemetery Preservation Workshop, Alabama Cemetery Preservation Alliance. For more information contact Mr. Ted Urquhart at ted.urquhart@cox.net.
- March 26, 2011—Cemetery Preservation for Churches. A 1-day workshop. For information contact Mr. Brian McKown, bryan@scdah.state.sc.us.
- To schedule a workshop in your community call us at 803-787-6910. We have 1-3 days programs.

Violet Bank is a Federal-style plantation house built on the banks of the Appomattox River

301 and north of the Appomattox River.



Violet Bank Cemetery showing several of the box tombs and surround stone wall.

in 1815. This structure replaced the original house, built by Thomas Shore about 1797 which burned in 1810.

The house still stands in Colonial Heights, Virginia in a quiet neighborhood just east of US

Surrounded by a dry laid stone wall the small plot contains six marked graves, as well as additional unmarked graves recently identified by Chicora during preservation efforts funded by a descendent.



William McIlvaine Wallace Box Tomb before repair showing damage.

Not far from the house is the historic Violet Bank cemetery. By 1936 the cemetery was recorded by WPA efforts as neglected with vines and poison ivy taking it over.

Conservation treatments were conducted at the small box tomb of William McIlvaine Wallace. The ledger

had been vandalized and the box had largely collapsed. Conservation included the repair of the shattered ledger and restoration of the original box. Work was also conducted on cleaning and resetting other monuments in the cemetery.



Wallace Box Tomb after repair.

Additional work is planned on a large collapsed box later in 2010. This will include extensive repairs to the collapsed box tomb of Elizabeth S. Gilliam. This work will include resetting the box tomb (including the replacement of a missing part). Also scheduled is treatment of the iron gate at the plot.



## Columbia's Lower Cemetery Cleaned

Cemetery success stories aren't common, but they do occur. A



**Before Clearing**

good example is the success surrounding the identification and cleaning of Columbia, SC's Lower Cemetery.

Begun around the time of the Civil War, Lower Cemetery was owned by the City of Columbia and was used to bury city residents – rich and poor, black and white. In fact, Confederate



**After Clearing**

soldiers were buried in this cemetery prior to the creation of a Confederate section in Columbia's private Elmwood Cemetery.

By at least the 1880s Columbia's city council established ordinances controlling the bur-

ial grounds, creating a cemetery sexton and grave digger. Rules and regulations regarding burials, protection of the burial grounds, and the necessary documentation were established.

But by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the burial ground had hit hard times. The City wasn't interested in maintaining it perhaps because the cemetery had become known as the "Negro Cemetery." The

The cemetery was still in active use in the 1930s, although by 1955 only three burials were recorded. We estimate that Lower Cemetery covered at least 5 acres. Today, even with the loss caused by the construction of I-126, at least 4 acres of the cemetery remains on the north side of the interstate. The cemetery, however, was covered by a thick growth of trees, kudzu, and poison ivy. Homeless camps had been established on graves.

We completed our report (<http://www.chicora.org/pdfs/RC521%20-%20Lower%20Cemetery.pdf>) on the cemetery in December 2009 and forwarded copies to Columbia's City Manager, Steve Gantt.

We were excited that Mr. Gantt quickly contacted the Foundation and wanted to set up a meeting to ensure the cemetery – which few in the City realized existed – was cleaned up and appropriately cared for.

In early 2010 we met with Amy Moore in the City's Historic Preservation Office as well as Melissa Smith Gentry, Director of Public Works, Sara Hollar, Superintendent of Forestry and Beautification, and Capt. E.T. Young, who is in charge of the North District (which includes Lower Cemetery).

A plan was put together to clean up Lower Cemetery and in matter of just a couple months the wooded section went from wilderness to nearly park-like. For the first time in over 50 years the cemetery is accessible – and being treated with the respect and dignity it deserves.

In the process of cleaning up the cemetery dozens more



**Additional stones exposed**

stones were identified – as well as row upon row of sunken grave depressions. We will return to the cemetery this winter to prepare a map of the identifiable graves, as well as record the additional stones.